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## Ebadi says public is now in 'despair'

IranTimes:Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi issued a warning on growing "public despair" in Iran over human rights abuses and economic pressures. In its quarterly report, Ebadi's organization, the Defenders of Human Rights Center, warned about the "perilous consequences of a prevalence of public despair." "The bad economic situation with inflation running at 25 percent, a growing number of unemployed and an ignorance of economic infrastructure" were issues raised by the group. The center also spoke out against hundreds of trials and punitive verdicts against activist students, teachers, laborers and women. "The group wishes that the country's rulers... take action to prevent violent reactions from unsatisfied people who have become frustrated that their civil and peaceful efforts" have not borne fruit, the report said, criticizing "the political system's lack of will to change discriminatory laws against women and a lack of tolerance in hearing cries for change." The report said, "Imprisonment, flogging and torment are still used against the followers of a movement seeking change for equality through calm and logical protest." The group also addressed the status of minors held in Iranian prisons, which has sparked protest from international rights groups. "At least 74 minors who committed capital crimes before reaching the age of 18 are



awaiting the gallows," the report said. In such cases in Iran, minors are often executed after they turn 18, but there have been reports of some people being hanged even before their 18th birthday. Two international treaties of which Iran is signatory bar executions at any age of anyone for crimes committed under the age of 18. "This center urges the authorities to take reasonable action, not just meaningless propaganda, to cure the chronic disease of human rights violations and to improve the livelihood of the people," it said. The Defenders of Human Rights Center, a group critical of the Islamic Republic over its treatment of dissidents and rights activists, was formed by five prominent rights lawyers and is headed by Ebadi, who won the Nobel peace prize in 2003.

## Ahmad Batebi escapes

IranTimes: After being sentenced to death, tortured and taken to the gallows, Ahmad Batebi—the political dissident who appeared on the cover of The Economist in 1999 holding up the bloodied shirt of one of his fellow demonstrators—has fled Iran and couple of months ago arrived in the United States. In March, after nearly eight years in Iranian prisons, being twice taken to the gallows and fitted with a noose, 31-year-old Batebi fled, was helped across the border into Iraq and granted permission to enter the United States "out of concern for his safety." He arrived June 24. When his flight from Vienna landed at Dulles Airport near Washington, D.C., Batebi said he was surprised to see that the airport employee guiding his plane into the gate was a Muslim woman wearing a head scarf. He said he was happy as he sensed a tolerance that was exactly what he had wished for in Iran. "It seems to me that people here are free to live their lives, as long as they do no harm to anyone else," he said. Now that Batebi is in America, he hopes to work to bring peaceful change to his country. He is also excited about studying politics and sociology and wants to work as a photojournalist. Then he added, "I want to fish! I'm going to go fishing!" In interviews with The New York Times and the Voice of America, Batebi described his involvement in the 1999 protests, his subsequent death sentence and his final escape. Batebi's escape prompted some media in Iran to question whether he was colluding with the United States and Israel. Batebi himself said the United States played no role in his escape. Through the translations of his Iranian-American friend and lawyer, Lily Mazahery, he made clear that although he had contempt for Iran's Islamic theocracy, he does not want a violent revolution. "No one with a healthy brain wants a revolution without a plan for what comes after," he said. "That's what happened in 1979." Batebi's disapproval of the Islamic theocracy may have first developed under the guidance of his parents. His father was a customs official under the Shah, but had fallen out of favor with the monarchist regime. His issue with the Shah, however, did not translate to support of the Islamic theocracy, and after the revolution he declined to join the Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards). His mother, an elementary school teacher, taught him and his younger brother and sister a tolerant form of Islam that seemed to be at odds with the regime's strict theology. But Batebi's mistrust of the Islamic regime extended from there; he said he first became aware of regime censorship in fourth grade when his teacher, upset with the distortion of an official

history textbook, told the class, "Go out and read other things to try to get the truth." "The teacher probably doesn't even remember," Batebi said. "But he changed the course of my life." A few weeks later, Batebi said he noticed people gathered near his school. When he went to find out what the commotion was about, he saw a man who had been accused of adultery, buried to the waist, his head covered with a sack that turned blood red as Pasdaran threw chunks of concrete at him. "I was utterly shocked," he recalled. "My



hands and legs were shaking." Afterward, he said he suffered nightmares. Years later, he said he witnessed public hangings and dismemberments. "But nothing had the impact of that stoning," he said. "I thought: this can't be Islam." At the University of Tehran in the mid-1990s, Batebi studied photojournalism and made two dozen short films with existentialist themes. He also joined in student protests and was arrested three times, but said he looked to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr for inspiration. The demonstrations exploded in 1999. In a wave of protests, thousands demonstrated against the closing of a newspaper, Salam. When the police fired into a crowd, a bullet hit a young man next to Batebi, who pulled off the student's shirt to try to stanch the bleeding. After carrying the wounded man to a makeshift clinic, he held up the shirt to warn other students. A photographer captured the moment in a photograph that was featured on the cover of The Economist. Batebi was already in jail; he learned he was on the cover when the judge hearing his case showed him the magazine and said,

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## National Geographic features Iran on cover



IranTimes:The National Geographic magazine for August carries a cover story on Iran. National Geographic is America's largest magazine in

terms of circulation with 8.5 million subscribers, double that of Number Two Consumer Reports. The article, entitled "Ancient Iran: Inside a nation's Persian soul," is about modern Iran and how current society is entwined with ancient history. There is one slip-up where the poet Saadi is cited as Sa'id. The article includes a 12-page portfolio of photos of the sites of historic Iran. And the map of the month is of Iran—modern Iran on one side and ancient Persia on the other.

## One God, One Message, One Religion

### Which Religion?

Even though the religious customs are different, worshipping 'GOD ALONE' is the basis and essence of all religions

### Unity of All Religions

Quran 42:13

He decreed for you the same religion decreed for Noah, and what we inspired to you (Mohammad), and what we decreed for Abraham, Moses, and Jesus:

"You shall uphold this one religion, and do not divide it."

Mark 10

17: As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

18: "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except GOD ALONE."

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: "The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Yasna 34:7

Therefore I wish You alone to be my shelter and helper through truth and righteousness.

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## Bill to allow hubby 2nd wife

IranTimes:The Majlis is considering a controversial bill to allow men to take a second wife without the first wife's consent; multiple marriage is currently allowed in Iran, but only with the prior consent of the wife. The bill, officially known as the Bill to Protect the Family but

wife's approval was actually set aside by the previous reformist-dominated Majlis because of vehement opposition from women's rights activists. But this time, the full bill was approved quietly by the Judiciary Committee and only became known when Etemad, a reformist daily, reported it. The government insisted on adding back the controversial marriage clause, one deputy told Etemad. The bill must now go to the full Majlis for a vote. Criticism of the proposed bill has been swift and broad. Women's rights activists are not the only ones fighting the bill, however, some religious leaders have also criticized it. Fatemeh Haqiqatju, a reformist deputy in the last Majlis, told Radio Farda the bill hurts rather than helps Iranian families. "This bill, unfortunately, doesn't give any answer to the present needs of society and families," she said, adding, "Also, it is silent about the [problem of] temporary marriages, which is in a deplorable situation." Musa Ghorbani, a member of the Judiciary Committee, said no one should dare oppose the bill. Ghorbani says it is fully in accord with Sharia law, has government support, and was tentatively approved on its first reading by the Majlis.



dubbed by women's rights activists as the "Antifamily Bill," has been before the Majlis for years. The controversial clause that gives men the right to have another spouse without the first